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President's Forum—Operational and Strategic Genius: Building the Main Battery for the New Maritime Strategy

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PRESIDENT'S FORUM



Operational and Strategic Genius: Building the Main Battery for the New Maritime Strategy

The “Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower” suggests new ways to design and operate the Navy. How do we anticipate what our leaders must learn to implement the Navy’s new strategy and its enabling concepts?

ONE OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE’S key missions is to prepare future leaders to operate effectively at the operational and strategic levels. This is the realm of the senior operational headquarters, a realm characterized by a wide scope of responsibility, geopolitical consequence, complexity, and uncertainty—a realm where the diplomatic, military, economic, and informational elements of national power intersect and must be managed. This is a realm where no one gives the leader a playbook or clear terms of relations with other stakeholders; nor is there likely to be an agreed-to organization chart. A commander at this level, charged with huge responsibilities, may find that he or she has not even been given a useful or practicable mission statement. Moreover, the commander and staff may discover that they are effectively “in charge” of very little, yet expected to deliver much.

How do we know that our curricula in fact prepare our students to meet this challenge? How do we figure out just what competencies leaders and those in supporting roles within our various operational headquarters will need to be successful in such a dynamic—indeed, chaotic—realm? Add to this the fact that the concept of a maritime headquarters is in full-blown transformation, and you get some idea of just how difficult a task this is. The Naval War College has worked with great focus and served as a “thought leader” and implementer of a range of initiatives to instantiate the Navy’s goal to be “a service focused at the operational level of war”^{*} and support the broader policy objectives defined in

^{*} This is the primary proposition that emerged in January 2006 from the first “CNO’s Maritime Security Conference,” which brought together the senior operational leadership of the Navy to consider its most pressing operational issues.

that strategy. Being at the nexus of this activity, the College is in an ideal position to help the Navy define both the functions and the competencies necessary to meet its goals.

Globalization has changed many features of war, and we see many of its rules changing as well. As our new maritime strategy (www.navy.mil/maritime/MaritimeStrategy.pdf) points out, maritime forces must play an increasingly prominent and strategic role, and they require close collaboration with international forces and nonmilitary organizations to do so. Coordinating and synchronizing activities across such a wide range of diverse partners emerge as key functions of a joint force commander. Coordinated and synchronized employment of joint, multinational, and multiagency forces in both peacetime and wartime demands a very sophisticated, globally netted command-and-control (C2) capability and a comprehensive system that develops Navy leaders able to use it. The maritime strategy emphasizes the necessity of understanding and employing maritime forces as a continuously engaged, globally distributed implement of national influence. This places an even greater premium on building the genius necessary to grasp the essence of a problem, to appreciate it in a strategic framework. It also assumes that the necessary competencies—cognitive and practical—will be in place to apply that force with strategic effectiveness.

The new strategy has brought into focus the links between maritime capability, the stability it ensures, and global prosperity. To achieve the underlying goal of regional or global maritime security, however, demands a degree of inter-agency and international cooperation never before achieved. The requirement is not so much for unity of command as for unity of effort. That unity relies on political mechanisms, decision processes, information and technical standards, and protocols to bring diverse stakeholders in global and regional stability into more cooperative and effective relationships.

Two drivers of naval force design emerge from the doctrinal logic of the strategy: the need for combat-credible forces focused in regions where the potential for major conventional operations is highest and where the demand for a prominent, war-winning deterrent is greatest; and the need for globally distributed forces tailored to specific regional strategies. The two drivers signal an evolution beyond the general-purpose force designed for the Cold War era.

Implications for How We Operate Naval Forces

The Naval Operating Concept supporting the strategy recognizes this evolution in how naval forces are used. Task forces are being employed less today as integrated formations built around aircraft carriers or big-deck amphibians and more as arrays of multipurpose platforms. These platforms can be dynamically employed to create a wide range of discrete operational-level effects—beyond the

awareness and control horizons of the group commander and his more tactically oriented staff. Further, naval forces are increasingly understood and valued as constituting a key strategic element of national power, applicable not just in a reserve or supporting role in the case of a major conventional operation but as an engagement force applied globally in a synchronized, concerted fashion “24/7,” 365 days a year, to achieve *strategic* effects—to prevent war, to avert crisis, to provide maritime security, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and to underwrite regional and global stability.

Formerly, strike groups would bring their command and control with them as a near-autonomous capability, in a virtual “bubble” of situational awareness and C2. Today, because of the long reach of naval weapons and sensors, the diversity and mobility of afloat forces, and their increasing criticality to other joint commanders for application across a wide range of missions, that bubble must be expanded and integrated into a joint doctrinal and C2 “blanket” that extends over and across regions. This requirement for integration is forcing the locus of planning and assessment to a higher level, into a joint functional maritime headquarters. We are maturing now the processes, terms of relations, and functions of this “Maritime Headquarters” and the “Maritime Operations Center.”*

These concepts are driving the Navy to review how it operates, commands, and controls maritime forces, in a globally synchronized way and in routine concert with a wider range of partners. The Naval War College has been at the center of the Navy’s ambitious effort to rethink its command-and-control structures and its operational headquarters functions. Given the traditional role the College has played in developing expertise at the operational and strategic levels, and given its involvement and leadership in the current raft of operational-level initiatives, it is well positioned to help the Navy define the competencies necessary to operate these evolved headquarters and operations centers.[†] Getting manpower requirements right is always challenging, but the fact that the Navy is still coming to grips with the broader, more robust command and control

* “MHQ w/ MOC,” or Maritime Headquarters with Maritime Operations Center. The MHQ is the headquarters that supports a maritime commander focused above the tactical level (i.e., at the operational level). The MOC is *not* the command center but rather that portion of the maritime headquarters (a combination of personnel, systems, and processes) that supports the operational requirements of the commander that could have various operational roles assigned (e.g., numbered fleet commander, as a designated joint-task-force commander). The MHQ w/ MOC concept is viewed as a system of systems whereby MOCs around the globe are connected so as to provide maritime situational awareness, support maritime security, and provide “reachback” to each other to deliver maritime capabilities to the combatant commanders.

[†] A Chief of Naval Operations e-mail of 24 November 2006 to the President of the Naval War College and Chief of Naval Personnel directed the College to identify the personnel and training requirements for MHQ w/ MOC. This followed verbal tasking to determine “what kinds of people and competencies . . . we need in these headquarters and MOCs.”

implied by its new strategy and operating concepts makes this assignment more difficult still. Nonetheless, great progress has been made. Even more promising, the process that the Naval War College has built to respond to this tasking promises to apply as well to the problem of defining manpower requirements more broadly across the Navy.

Understanding Manpower Requirements in Terms of Joint Capabilities

The Navy is coming to grips with the need to understand manpower requirements in terms of joint capabilities. Building on the work of the Quadrennial Defense Review,* the Navy has determined that we need to understand manpower in terms of “capabilities”—and that this capability-driven aspect of manpower would result in understanding the Navy’s workforce requirements. Manpower requirements would, perhaps for the first time, be linked directly to *mission-essential tasks* in order to understand the effect of manpower decisions on warfighting readiness. This is how we must determine what expertise belongs in our operational headquarters and operations centers—by looking first at what they must do and how they must do it.

Historically, the Navy has been world class at building competence through training. Further, its forward-deployed tempo has generated vast experience. However, competence emerging from training and deployment experience is predominately tactical in nature. On the other hand, Naval War College research, empirical evidence, and senior leadership assessment demonstrate that operational- and strategic-level competence is built through a *blend* of focused training, education, and experience *across a continuum*: competencies are built over time. Experience in tactical tours, no matter how strenuous, simply does not normally equate to expertise at the operational level of war.

The College’s response to the tasking of the Chief of Naval Operations eventually involved a cross-functional team of experts to conduct research in partnership with U.S. fleet forces.† Starting with joint warfighting-capability requirements, the team set out to articulate a comprehensive understanding of the operational-level-of-war domain; to build from an inclusive view of how mission-essential tasks, organizational processes, systems, and people need to

* The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) is a congressionally mandated vehicle through which the Defense Department undertakes a wide-ranging review of strategy, programs, and resources. Specifically, the QDR is expected to delineate a national defense strategy consistent with the most recent National Security Strategy by defining force structure, modernization plans, and a budget plan allowing the military to execute successfully the full range of missions within that strategy.

† This collaboration, defined below as the Capabilities Based Competency Assessment, is led at the Naval War College by Professor Richard Suttie. Together with Fleet Forces Command’s MHQ w/ MOC Project Team, the College has conducted a two-year study to map the manpower requirements and skill sets necessary to support the new concept.

work together; and then to integrate a dynamic, analytically reliable, valid, and repeatable methodology that would generate the manpower requirements for the operational level of war. This effort came to be known as CBCA (Capabilities Based Competency Assessment) and is viewed as a critical path to implementing the Navy's new headquarters concept.

Ultimately, we expect the CBCA process to yield specific manpower requirements, including competencies that the warfighter identifies as critical to mission tasks. It should also give us valid, reliable, capability-focused, and competency-based manpower requirements for MHQ/MOC operational positions. It will also identify, for each operational position, the importance, frequency, and duration of use of specific equipment and systems and the language, regional expertise, and cultural awareness (LREC) competencies needed. Through process-based analysis and optimization we also expect to understand the manpower costs and savings.

This work will continue through 2009, but we estimate that the methodology will lead to fundamental changes in how people are understood—in the context of tasks, work, and missions. This will allow us at the Naval War College to understand better how the genius of our academic faculty and the curricula that the faculty creates yield the capabilities demanded by our new strategy and its enabling concepts. As this vanguard effort reports out, we will know that what we are teaching is on target, and if it is not, we—as we have demonstrated the responsiveness to do—will adjust fires.

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